No. 34

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

When he boarded the steamer for Paris, he found, by prearrangement, a voluptuous young woman who had been in the front row of a chorus, already comfortably settled in a steamer chair.

R. of M. G., No. 34.

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PHILIP GORDON and Dr. Van Buren were talking about the engagement of Marie Desmond and Harold Wayne. The doctor had expressed his surprise at a woman of Marie's superior mentality becoming engaged to such a man as Wayne.

"Men like Wayne," Phil was saying, "with a very interesting and colored past, usually know how to turn the trick. It is a strange thing that most women are ready to fall for a man of his character. They do it, though. Yes, they do it."

The speaker's tone was hard and cold, and it did not escape Dr. Van Buren's attention that Phil was considerably wrought up.

"Yes, I suppose you are right, old man," he agreed reluctantly. "Such things do happen. But I had expected something entirely different from Miss Desmond. This thing seems strange to me. I watched the couple closely during dinner, but there was aboslutely no sign of affection between them."

"No?" Phil laughed again, and even more harshly.

"Not the least sign of it," the other reiterated. "On the contrary, Miss Desmond evidenced an unmistakable antipathy toward Wayne whenever he spoke to her. Twice I saw her frown."

"That's easily explained, doctor," rejoined Phil. "No doubt they had a lovers' quarrel during the afternoon."

Dr. Van Buren shook his head thoughtfully.

"Phil," he said in a confidential tone and moving his chair a little closer to that of his companion, "I am going to talk very plainly to you now. If I say anything you don't like, I want you to know that my motive for doing so is the best."

"Alright, fire away," urged Phil.

"I have observed upon several occasions that Harold Wayne was unnecessarily attentive to your wife," the physician continued. "And I also observed that these attentions were encouraged. Twice I saw them walking through the grounds arm in arm.

"Now, please understand me, I do not wish to insinuate that there is or ever was anything wrong between them, but Wayne's declaration that Miss Desmond is his affianced wife, came as a shock to me."

Gordon's color came and went, and his brow furrowed into a dark frown. Alice's open flirtations with Wayne had been observed by him.

Sharp words had often been on the tip of his tongue to bring his wife within the bounds of propriety, but he remained silent. Why? Perhaps he did not feel himself quite free from blame.

Were not his thoughts, too, occupied more than was proper with a woman other than his wife? Had he not indulged in forbidden thoughts in connection with this beautiful governess?

Yes, he had done that often and thus shown the weakness to which the average man becomes prey.

In his soul Phil already admitted that Marie Desmond could not be at fault. She was far too superior to Harold Wayne to forget herself.

And yet, on the other hand, grave doubts persisted upon remaining in his mind. What need was there for Wayne and Miss Desmond meeting at the pavilion at such a late hour of the night?

If the man's intentions had been honorable there was no reason why he could not have courted her openly and at a more respectable hour.

The position in which he found them had certainly been compromising. And they had looked guilty —both of them.

Dr. Van Buren sat blowing great clouds of smoke from between his pursed lips. A great struggle was going on within him. His confidence in his own observation had been shaken.

He had never quite abandoned that suspicion that this lovely Miss Desmond was none other than Philip Gordon's first wife. But he lacked the convincing proof.

And still, he argued with himself, Miss Desmond had the voice, the eyes and the movements of the first Mrs. Gordon.

If she was in reality Phil's first wife, believed dead, but never divorced, how could she become engaged to Wayne? The situation was utterly an impossible one.

"Phil," he said, as he rose slowly from his chair, "there is something on my mind that must be either cleared or banished. What it is, I am not prepared to state. I'll say this, however, right now: I don't believe that Miss Desmond cares a snap of her finger for Wayne.

"If they are married, I'll be the most surprised man in the world. There is something unusual at the bottom of this situation. There is no love between Wayne and this governess. That is very plain to me."

No reply was forthcoming. Neither did Phil move as the physician excused himself for a moment and left the room.

As Dr. Van Buren stepped into the dimly lighted corridor he noticed Harold Wayne coming from the rear. He had his hat and cane, which seemed to indicate that he was about to take his departure.

The physician stopped involuntarily. Something told him to remain quiet and wait. Wayne passed him as he drew back into the shadow of the portieres. Then someone came hurriedly down the stairs. It was a woman, who met Wayne and held him back.

It was Philip Gordon's wife, and from where he stood, entirely unobserved, Dr. Van Buren saw the pallor of her face.

"Harold," she said reproachfully, "is that the way for you to leave me?"

"I must, Alice," the young man answered in a low voice. "I wanted to spare you all unpleasant explanations."

"But I have not asked you to explain," she protested.

"I know you haven't," Wayne said. "But I must not even speak to you because I have given my word that I wouldn't."

"You have given your word, Harold?"

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"Miss Desmond."

Something like a hiss escaped Alice at the mentioning of Marie Desmond's name. From where he stood Dr. Van Buren not only heard every word, but he could also see Alice's hideously convulsed features.

"So she made you promise that you would never speak to me again," the latter said in a forcibly subdued voice. "I suppose she made you believe that she came to the pavillion last night for the sole purpose of preventing us from being caught by my husband."

Harold Wayne nodded his head vigorously.

"I believe it because I know it to be true, Alice," he declared manfully. "And Miss Desmond did more than that. She made me realize what a low beast I am. Now listen to me for a moment. I played your husband the dirtiest trick one man can play another.

"I accepted his hospitality and made love to you when his back was turned. That was the act of a miserable cad, and I can't begin to tell you how much I regret

it.

"How Miss Desmond knew that you and I had agreed to meet at the pavilion last night, I don't know, but I thank God she came. You can thank her for preventing a certain tragedy. She came for that purpose alone and——"

Dr. Van Buren did not care to hear anymore. He was so wrought up that he felt like running from his hiding place and shaking Harold Wayne by the hand and at the same time tell Mrs. Gordon what he thought of her.

But one thought dominated his mind. This lovely governess was absolutely innocent.

Marie had gone to the pavilion to save the woman who was not fit to touch the hem of her skirt. Ah, such nobility of character was almost beyond his comprehension.

The fact that Dr. Van Buren was a privileged character in the Gordon home will excuse his next move.

He came from out of his hiding place and walked straight toward Wayne and Alice, still standing at the bottom of the stairway.

Alice gave him a half inquisitive, half defiant look, while her companion changed color.

Up the stairs the physician went and the next minute found him at the door which led to the nursery. He knocked gently.

No response came. His second and more vigorous effort produced a faint:

"Come in!"

He entered and saw the governess fully dressed to go out, seated at the window alone. She jumped up at once and crossed the room to meet him.

"Where are the children?" Dr. Van Buren inquired.

"Annie has taken them out for a walk," Marie told him.

"Oh," he said, and hesitated.

She looked at the unexpected visitor with a puzzled expression on her lovely face. His eyes, meeting hers, held boundless admiration and something she could not fathom.

"What—what is it, doctor?" she gasped, apprehensive.

"I—I came to offer you my most profound apology, my dear Miss Desmond," he stammered.

"Apology?" incredulous. "For what?"

"For believing something base of you," Dr. Van Buren said shamefacedly.

Again Marie's eyes met his.

"I—I don't understand, doctor. Please explain."

"Will you tell me why you have deliberately sacrificed yourself for another?" he asked gently. "You did something only a woman of——"

"You are talking in riddles," she interrupted him.

"It was through an accident that I learned the truth," the physician went on. "I just overheard a conversation between Mrs. Gordon and Harold Wayne. What I learned astounded me. You have purposely exposed yourself to disgrace to shield the good name of the Gordon family.

"Now, please do not contradict me," he cried quickly as she made a deprecatory gesture with her hand. "I know this to be a positive fact. You do not realize what a consolation it is to me that you are not actually engaged to Mr. Wayne.

"Ah, what a pity it would be if you should chose to waste your beautiful life on a man so utterly unworthy. Frankly, I can not conceive the possibility of such a thing. Wayne is utterly unfit to become your husband."

Marie gave him a faint smile.

"I am grateful to you for your kindly interest in me, doctor," she said, unable to keep the quiver out of her voice. "But allow me to speak a word in favor of Mr. Wayne. He is more of a man than he is generally credited with being."

Dr. Van Buren glanced at her quickly.

"If you say that, Miss Desmond, it must be true. You would not defend a man unless he was worthy."

When, after waiting for a long while, the physician received no response from the governess, he walked over toward the door, then returned.

It was quite evident that he was not yet ready to leave her.

Chapter 110

THE CHILDREN'S PLEA.

WHEN A MAN loves a woman it is not always necessary for him to tell her so. Usually a woman knows it before the fact can be put in words. Marie had known long since that Dr Van Buren took more than just ordinary interest in her. During their many meetings in the nursery when he came to treat the boy, he had shown his affection for her in no uncertain manner.

And now he had come to tell her how he rejoiced because he learned about her innocence.

He had told her in plain words that it was a consolation to him to know that she was not engaged to marry Harold Wayne. There was subdued passion in the manner in which he spoke.

There was something more intimate in the manner in which he reached for her hand and held it in spite of her efforts to release it.

"If—if you have learned the facts in the case," she said nervously, "I have nothing to say except that I am very glad, doctor. I admit, I took Mrs. Gordon's place in the pavilion last night so that her husband would not find her with Mr. Wayne. That is true.

"But," she added hastily, "you must promise me something. You must give me your word that you will not speak of it to any other person. Least of all must you mention it to Phil—I mean Mr. Gordon."

She colored to the roots of her hair at the slip. "You see, I meant it all for the best, and God knows there is misery and unhappiness enough in this world al-

ready."

Dr. Van Buren's face paled. He had been on the verge of telling this wonderful woman how dearly he loved her. But she had thrown cold water on his hopes.

Her only thoughts were of Philip Gordon. Her sole anxiety was to keep him from knowing something that would hurt him. No woman ever made a greater sacrifice than this Miss Desemond insisted upon making now.

If Gordon could be spared she was ready to suffer suspicion and contempt in silence.

What motive could actuate her? What could move her to assume disgrace and shame for any man and sacrifice everything—even her honor for him, but love?

The physician stood with his head bowed. His very soul thirsted for a word of love from the lips of this woman, and instead he was compelled to hear that she trembled for another man's welfare.

"If you wish it, I will keep your secret, Miss Desmond," he said presently, his voice a trifle hoarse. "And I want you to know that I have the highest regard for you. No matter what the future may bring, if you are ever in need of a loyal friend, please come to me."

As the physician spoke these words and he turned to leave the room, Marie barred the way.

"I need you now, dear friend," she said with tears in her eyes.

"Then I am ready to help you if I can," he told her.

She looked at him long and earnestly.

"Perhaps you will not be able to do anything for me," the woman went on hastily. "You see, Mr. Gordon has ordered me to leave his house and I am ready to go now. But I have grown to love his two children and I can not bear to part with them."

Dr. Van Buren stood immovable. Ah, what would not he give to help her.

He might go to Phil Gordon and tell him—repeat to him the conversation which took place between Alice and Harold Wayne. But had not Miss Desmond asked him to remain silent?

His eyes searched Marie's tear-wet features for a clue which would explain her motive. His knowledge of human nature gave him but one answer.

The anxiety and the desperation this Miss Desmond exhibited could only originate from a mother's love. Ah, if he were sure that the woman was Gordon's first wife.

He tried to comfort her as best he could by saying:

"Do not be hasty about leaving, Miss Desmond. Mr. Gordon tells me that you are to remain another week when your term of employment expires. Much can happen within that time. Have faith in yourself. Have faith in Him, who will not suffer a wrong done to the innocent."

With these words he quitted the nursery hastily. Marie gazed after him, the tears stealing silently down her cheeks.

The following day brought no change in the situation. This was Tuesday and Marie was to leave on Monday of the next week. Marie noticed with a sinking heart that Phil avoided her as much as he could.

Cut to the core, she decided to take all of her meals for the remainder of her service with the children in the nursery.

Marie was desperate. Since Harold Wayne's leaving she was placed in a truly frightful position.

She could no longer hide behind the untrue assertion that she was his betrothed and that they had met as honorable lovers that night in the pavilion.

With Wayne gone, she had to fight it out alone. She attached a sinister significance to the fact that Phil shunned her. Did he believe that she had been Harold Wayne's mistress.

In unhappy anticipation of her approaching separation from the children, Marie's life was miserable in the extreme.

When she watched them at play she had to turn away to hide the tears that insistently welled up in her eyes. She could hardly withstand the mad impulse of snatching them to her bosom and take them with her. And why not? They were her own flesh and blood. Even Phil could not love them as she did.

Had she not practically saved her boy's life? When she was no longer with him, who would give him the care and love he needed. Such thoughts drove the wretched woman to the brink of despair.

Two more days passed, and then came little Harry's birthday. Ah, what a happy event this had always been in the years gone by.

Marie hugged the boy close to her breaking heart as she woke him that morning. She had remembered him with a new scooter and a toy gun and a cowboy suit.

Arrayed in this he marched proudly downstairs to greet his father in the library.

On his way he met Nora Evans. As he turned his head in passing, the girl clutched at his arm and held him.

And right then she gave an exhibition of what a contemptible, low-born female can be capable of.

"Hello, there, cowboy!" she cried sneeringly. "Where did you get that cheap suit?"

"Miss Desmond bought me that suit, and it isn't cheap," he protested manfully. "You let go my arm. I don't like you."

"Oh, you'll learn to like me alright after your dear Miss Desmond is gone," Nora retorted with an ugly laugh. "And believe me, you'll walk the chalk mark, kid."

"Miss Desmond is never going to leave us," the boy exclaimed wrathfully.

"Oh, isn't she?" the girl returned, her thin lips curling in another sneer. "You ask your father about it. Miss Desmond was fired and she leaves on Monday."

The boy's features turned white. Without saying another word to Nora Evans he ran down the stairs and straight into the library. In his excitement he forgot his usual "Good morning, dad."

"Oh, daddy," he cried, his lips quivering, "Nora just told me that Miss Desmond is going to leave. It isn't true, is it?"

Gordon's color changed. He took the boy in his arms and held him close.

"Yes, it is true, my little man," he said, not quite sure of his voice. "Miss Desmond has served notice that she is leaving us. But you must not let that make you unhappy. Today is your birthday. Look what I have for you."

A number of expensive toys were piled up on the table, but the boy never once even glanced at them.

The painful silence between father and son was broken when little Phyllis bounced into the room. She, too, had just been told about Miss Desmond's leaving.

With her sweet mouth agape she ran up to her father and broke into tears. Harry considered this the proper time to give way to his own childish grief. The scene was pitiful in the extreme.

Gordon looked at his two children in perplexity and helplessness.

Ah, if he could only make them understand how he dreaded this Miss Desmond's going. But what could

he say?

The governess had sent her resignation to him in writing with one of the servants and he had accepted it, believing it to be the best thing to be done under the circumstances.

But he had reckoned without the children's affection for their governess. It made his heart bleed to see them both sobbing.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" he cried with a laugh, strangely devoid of mirth. "This will never do. Come with me."

Leading Harry by one hand and Phyllis by the other, they left the library and headed upstairs. Marie was busy tidying up the nursery as Phil entered with the children.

She surmised instantly what must have happened when Harry left his father and ran up to her.

The way the boy embraced her brought tears to Phil's eyes. And while she hugged the boy, little Phyllis was clutching at the folds of her dress, sobbingly begging for attention.

Then Harry's obvious and piteous misery found expression in words.

"Miss Desmond, you don't want to leave us, do you?" he pleaded. "What will Phyllis and I do if you go? Nora will beat us again." Then he turned to his father. "Dad," he continued to plead, "I don't want anything else for my birthday but Miss Desmond. Make her stay here."

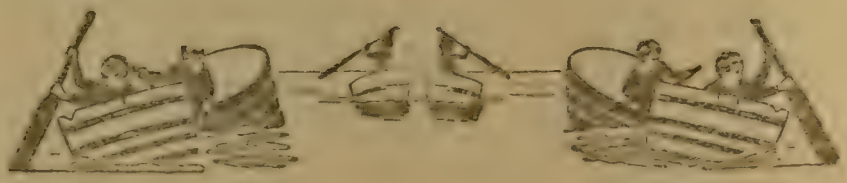
Gordon was being crucified. He wanted to please his two children, and yet reason told him that he must not yield. How could he countenance the presence of this woman whose reputation was under a cloud?

Afraid to trust himself to speak right now, he turned and left the room.

Marie could have shrieked at the top of her voice in her agony. But she held herself under control and her soft persuasion served to quiet the children.

Phyllis even smiled a little, although Harry refused to become reconciled to the idea of her leaving.

The excitement told on him to such an extent that a slight fever developed. Shortly before noon Marie sent word to Phil that Dr. Van Baren better be sent for.



Chapter 111

THE INVISIBLE BOND.

ABOUT ONE o'clock the physician arrived. He examined the boy and shook his head gravely. A complete change was very evident in the little patient. Phil, who was watching Dr. Van Buren winced. Neither spoke a word until they once more were seated in the library. It was the unhappy father's anxiety which broke out in the words:

"What is your opinion about the boy's condition, doctor?"

"Not at all favorable," the man of medicine replied.

Gordon's face blanched.

"You—you don't mean to say that he has suffered a relapse?" he cried.

"No, I would not say that," was the slow response. "However, I am frankly worried about Harry. He has evidently passed through some excitement which is bad for him. A boy of his delicate organization can not stand it. What he must have is the greatest care."

Gordon nodded reflectively and sorrowfully.

"You know what it is all about, don't you, doctor?" he said. "He found out that Miss Desmond is leaving us, and he nearly had a fit. He and Phyllis both shed bitter tears."

"It is indeed unfortunate that Miss Desmond should leave at this time," responded Dr. Van Buren. "If the boy were in perfect health, she would not be missed so much. But under the conditions her going is bound to have a bad effect. He seems to love her very

much, doesn't he?"

"Both of the children love her," Gordon admitted with a suppressed groan.

Dr. Van Buren thought a moment.

"Can't you prevail upon her to stay?" he asked.

Phil shook his head stubbornly.

'How can I do that after what happened?" he exclaimed. "How can you expect me to beg her not to leave?"

"You are allowing foolish pride to rule you in this case, Phil," the other said reproachfully. "And no doubt you are under the mistaken impression that Miss Desmond is not a fit person to take care of your children. You are wrong in both instances."

"I don't think I am," Gordon contended. "You don't know all I do. I had a confidential talk with Wayne before he left and——"

"Now listen to me a moment!" Dr. Van Buren flared up. "I don't care a continental what Wayne told you. Perhaps he told you the truth, perhaps he did not. You evidently still believe that Miss Desmond committed an indiscretion.

"Suppose, however, that on my word of honor, I assured you that there is not the slightest blame attached to her? What would you say, and what would you do?

"Suppose I assured you that the nature of the incident in the pavilion is not what you think, would you believe me? Unfortunately I am not in a position to tell you the truth because I am bound by my honor not to reveal certain facts.

"But I'll tell you this," the physician concluded, his voice ringing with sincerity and conviction, "you do Miss Desmond a rank injustice when you believe that she had any dishonorable relations with Harold Wayne.

"On the contrary, I know positively that she never liked the man. Why, she despises him for the way he acted. He may be in love with her. That would not surprise me. But, as I said before, she despises him."

Gordon was so surprised that he could not find words to reply. He knew Dr. Van Buren too long and too well to doubt anything he said.

"You seem to be well informed, my friend," he grinned.

"My information is positive," was the quick retort. "And, please, do not misunderstand me, old man. I am interested in Miss Desmond only to the extent of wanting to see justice done."

"But — but," Phil stammered, "I have not been unjust."

"So far as she is concerned you have been unjust without knowing it," the physician returned. "You took something for granted that never happened."

By degrees the clouds were being swept from the unhappy man's mind. By nature inclined to jealousy, it took a good argument to make him change his viewpoint in the case.

He loved Miss Desemond, and for a time he suspected that Dr. Van Buren had fallen for the woman's exquisite charm.

Again he proceeded cautiously by saying:

"Miss Desmond is to be congratulated upon having such a warm champion in you, doctor. You almost lead me to believe that——"

"I know what you are thinking," the other broke in quickly, "I frankly admit I admire her. She is my ideal of a woman, but there it ends. But you owe her something you can never repay.

"Her loving care and devotion saved your boy's life. If you permit her to leave, I will not answer for the

consequences. As I indicated before, a relapse might be fatal to Harry."

Gordon realized the truth of the doctor's statement only too well.

Yes, Miss Desmond had saved his boy's life. She had been like a mother to both of his children.

With an impulsive gesture he held out his hand and for a moment the two men stood eye to eye.

"I am grateful to you, my friend," he said to Dr. Van Buren, his voice trembling with an emotion he did not try to curb. "You don't know what it cost me to accept Miss Desmond's resignation. I knew then that I could never replace her, for the children have learned to love her."

The physician gave Phil's hand another shake.

"Now don't lose any time in asking her to stay," he urged.

"I'll do so at once," was the quick retort.

Dr. Van Buren smiled as Gordon almost ran from the room.

Whistling softly to himself he picked up his bag and went out into the hall. No one saw him leave the house, so quietly did he go.

Marie had just succeeded in coaxing Harry to sleep in the nursery as Phil opened the door noiselessly and entered.

The picture he saw brought a lump to his throat. The governess was seated on a chair with her back turned. The boy was soundly asleep on her lap, both of his arms tight about her neck.

In this position he could see that the lad's face was still wet. He had gone to sleep in tears.

Without uttering a sound he stole up to the woman and took the boy from her. Very tenderly he placed him on the bed, then turned to Miss Desmond and said in a

whisper:

"I must speak to you. Will you please come into the next room with me for a moment?"

A delicate flush overspread her face.

She inclined her head and followed Gordon from the nursery in silence. For a painful moment they stood confronting each other. Phil seemed to have some difficulty in finding his voice.

"Miss Desmond," he spoke at last, "I have come to ask you to stay with us. Won't you withdraw your resignation?"

The pallor of her face was almost ghastly. But presently the color returned. Twice she attempted to make a reply, and each time something obstructed her throat. Finally she succeeded.

"You are asking the impossible, Mr. Gordon," she murmured, her head bowed and refusing to look at him. "The unfortunate affair in which I became involved has left me under a cloud. That night you told me that I was not a fit person to——"

"Yes, I know—I know," Phil broke in anxiously. "I did not know then what I know now. I hold you absolutely blameless."

Slowly her eyes were raised to his. Hers were were filled with tears.

Woman-like she wondered what had brought about this change in Phil's attitude toward her. Had Harold Wayne confessed the truth before he departed?

But the question which trembled on her lips never found utterance. The door was rudely opened and little Phyllis ran into the room.

Regardless of her father's dark frown, she clung to the governess. Her voice held a plaintive note as she said:

"I have no one to play with, Miss Desmond. Won't

you come out on the lawn with me?"

"Yes, I'll be with you in a moment, dear," Marie answered with a beautiful smile. "Now run along. I am just about to promise your daddy that I will not go away."

"Oh, you'll stay?" the child cried joyously.

"I—I think so," murmured the governess.

"Then I am happy," Phyllis exclaimed, bounding away. "I must find Harry and tell him."

Gordon ran after Phyllis and caught her just as she was about to run into the nursery.

He whispered a few words into her ear, then pressed a tender kiss upon those sweet, childish lips, and watched her disappear down the stairs.

He returned to the room where Marie stood at the window. At his approach she wheeled about. Phil saw at once that she had been weeping, and his heart went out to her.

"Miss Desmond," he said very gently, "I am about as happy as my little girl. Of course," he added with a whimsical smile, "I take it for granted that you are going to stay, for you practically promised Phyllis a moment ago that you would. You—you meant it when you said it, didn't you?"

There was such desperate pleading in his voice and eyes that Marie had to summon every ounce of her strength to keep from breaking out in tears anew.

"Yes, I meant it," she acknowledged. "I will stay for the children's sake. I have learned to love them dearly, and they love me. What their affection has meant to me no one can realize but myself. I am glad you have changed your opinion with regard——"

Gordon held up a hand, waving her to silence.

"Please—please, not another word about that," he begged. "We must never refer to that again. I have been

unjust. The situation in which I found you is my excuse.

"Perhaps you do not know that I have had some very bitter disappointments in my life," he went on, emotion dominating him. "The misery I suffered and still must continue to suffer, can not be well put in words.

"It was very hard for me to think that I had been mistaken in you who had earned the highest place in my regard and esteem. But that is all changed now. All I would ask that you bear no ill will toward me. Love my children as you always have done and I shall be forever grateful."

Marie had reached the end of her power for sustained self-control. About to break down utterly, a sound from the nursery came to the rescue.

"Miss Desmond!" cried Harry's voice. "Miss Desmond. Where are you?"

"You—you'll excuse me, won't you?" she managed to gasp, then hurriedly left the room.

"Here I am, dear," she answered as she entered the nursery. "Why, I thought you were soundly asleep, you lazy boy. Who ever heard of a big boy like you sleeping on his birthday. Why, I am ashamed of you."

Harry raised himself on one arm and with the other hand pointed at the partly open door back of the governess.

But the smiling face of his father he saw, disappeared quickly. Marie closed the door, then came back to the boy.

"I have some good news for you, Harry," she told him as she gathered him in her arms. "I am going to stay with you."

The boy's joyous shout gladdened the mother's heart. Again and again his warm lips were pressed to hers. Then his hands fondled her moist cheeks.

"I am so glad," he exclaimed.

She hugged him.

"So am I," the governess said. "Now tell me just how you feel. Do you feel well enough to take a walk with me?"

"Indeed I do, Miss Desmond," was the prompt retort. "I want to go with you."

There could be no question that the news of Miss Desmond remaining at Oak Manor had brought about a quick and favorable change in the boy's condition.

His eyes were bright and his every move bespoke renewed vivacity. He was the picture of happiness when a few minutes later he left the nursery, hanging on Miss Desmond's arm.

Chapter 112

THE ACTOR

IT SEEMED that the dove of peace had once more come to roost in the Fillmore apartment. Ruth, amid a shower of repentant tears had told her husband the truth about her youthful love affair. She told him how, as a young girl, fresh from college, she had fallen for the blandishments of an older man, and how she was saved from disaster by the timely interference of her brother. And Guy had listened with his face averted.

But after it was all over, he had taken her in his arms and kissed her. Then, for a time, they seemed happy. But within a week Guy came home totally drunk, which was a violation of his promise to Ruth.

As usual, when in this condition, he was quarrelsome. He took a fiendish delight in reminding her of past mistakes.

The barrier she had removed by baring her soul to him, was again erected, and this time on a firmer foundation.

What made matters worse was the fact that Guy remained whole nights away from home, and utterly refused to be questioned about it by his wife.

Ruth knew that Guy repeatedly strayed from the straight and narrow path. A number of highly colored stories which involved her husband and certain chorus women, came to her. But she was powerless to stop it.

And then a strange thing happened. One night, about thirty minutes before dinner, Guy phoned that he was bringing a guest for dinner.

"Who is it?" Ruth inquired.

"Vernon Douglass, the actor," he told her. "You heard me speak of him. He is the man I am writing a play for."

"Alright," said the young wife, then hung up the receiver.

Thoughtfully she went about the apartment. She wondered what possessed Guy to bring this actor home to dinner with him on this particular night.

For a moment she feared that their friendship had been formed on an impulse, and while both were under the influence of liquor.

"If they both come intoxicated, I'll leave the house," she muttered as she changed her dress.

But the contrary proved to be the case. Guy was on his best behavior when he came home. He even kissed her, something he was no longer in the habit of doing.

Vernon Douglass, the actor, proved to be a very handsome man, who bore all the earmarks of a finished product of the dramatic stage. He was tall with the manners of a foreign nobleman.

"My wife—Mr. Douglass," Guy said by the way of an introduction.

Ruth held out her hand with charming grace.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Douglass," she murmured, a wave of color in her cheeks.

"The pleasure is all mine," the actor assured her

Why they stood with their hands clasped for an unnecessary long time neither knew. Finally Ruth allowed hers to drop, and then she noticed that her husband was watching her through the corners of his eyes

"I hope you were not inconvenienced by your husband bringing me as a guest this evening," Douglass spoke again.

"Not at all," she responded. "Indeed, I am gla

to have you."

Fillmore smiled as he listened to this exchange of words between the actor and his wife.

"Mr. Douglass and I are closely associated right now," he said turning to the latter. "The play I am writing for him at Mr. Belasco's instructions will make us both famous and rich."

"You are very hopeful," remarked Douglass.

"Always was," Guy laughed. "And what do you think, Ruth," he went on with warm enthusiasm, "Mr. Douglass has reserved a box for us to-night."

"Ah, that is very nice of you," said the young wife, her cheeks dimpling. "I am a lover of good drama. One sees so few of them since moving pictures are in vogue."

The actor nodded.

"I hope you will like our play, Mrs. Fillmore."

"I am sure I will," she responded promptly.

At this juncture Fillmore took his guest by the arm and led him into the dining room. Judging by appearances they were the best of friends. Ruth was somewhat puzzled.

How was it that Guy had never spoken of Vernon Douglass before bringing him home to dinner?

Why this sudden intimacy, and why had her husband smiled in such a peculiar manner while the actor was holding her hand?

When the servants brought in the dishes, the three seated themselves at the table. The conversation carried on between them was frequently interrupted by Ruth's melodious laughter.

Douglass proved to be a very interesting individual. And young Mrs. Fillmore had never met a real actor.

After the dinner was over, the man went into the library where they chatted and smoked while Ruth hurried away to dress for the show.

She looked radiantly beautiful as she appeared in a low-cut gown of pink silk.

The actor's eyes were devouring her greedily. Fillmore noticed his enraptured glance and smiled.

That was the beginning of Ruth's friendship with Douglass. During the performance she watched his every move, applauded his every speech with the enthusiasm born of hero worship.

When the curtain dropped upon the last scene, Ruth left the box with her husband as if in a daze.

"What do you think of him?" the latter asked.

"Ah, I think he is just splendid," she responded, her cheeks burning.

"And he is just as fine a fellow as he is an actor," Fillmore went on as they pressed forward through the crowd. "He is well worth knowing and quite an addition to your drawing room. I know several women of our set who would give a good deal to be on friendly terms with Mr. Douglass."

Mrs. Fillmore was duly impressed with her husband's statement. She had already imbibed freely of social ambition.

"You must invite him to dine with us again, Guy," she said.

"I will," he promised.

The next time Douglass came to the Fillmore home, he came alone. It was during the afternoon when Ruth happened to be alone.

At first the young Mrs. Fillmore seemed somewhat reluctant to receive him, but this feeling soon wore off, for she found it quite easy to talk to him. This wonderful actor was only a mere man after all.

He was witty, anxious to please and generous with his compliments. The two hours they spent together were pleasant indeed.

When Ruth told her husband that night about the actor's visit, he patted her on the cheek.

"You did the proper thing in entertaining him," he approved.

"Are you sure that there is nothing improper about it?" she inquired doubtfully. "I was afraid——"

"Why, you silly goose," he laughed. "You may cultivate the friendship of any man so long as I do not object. It is perfectly proper for Mr. Douglass to call on you even if I am not at home."

"But supposing some of our gossiping friends find it out, Guy? Don't you think they will talk?"

"If they do, it is because they are jealous, Ruth. I dare say Mr. Douglass could call on any married woman of our set and he would be received with wide open arms."

What little scruples Ruth still had soon vanished.

The following day her husband announced that he had to make a trip to Paris in connection with the play he was writing. He said he would be gone for several weeks.

Ruth was a little disappointed. It was the first time she would be alone since their marriage.

"I'll be lonesome without you, dear," she murmured.

"Now don't kid me like that, Ruth," he laughed.

"I am not kidding you, Guy. I mean it." As she snuggled close up to him she added: "You don't know how I appreciate the change which has come over you. You have been so nice to me since you brought Mr. Douglass to our home. And you drink less than you——"

"I have cut that out," he interrupted. "No more booze for me."

After a moment of silence Ruth said with a pretty pout:

"Why must you go to Paris without me?"

"I expected you to ask that question," Fillmore replied, a slight frown crossing his brow. "In the first place I can not afford it. And in the second place I can't be bothered. You see, the opening scene of the play I am writing is laid in Paris. I am after the proper local color and——"

"Alright, that is enough," Ruth broke in with a sigh. "Nothing is further from my mind than even the thought of bothering you in your work."

They stepped apart by mutual consent.

"Now while I am gone," Fillmore spoke again, "I don't expect you to sit here with your hands folded. I have no objection to you going out and enjoying yourself."

"Thanks for the permission," said Ruth.

Her husband made no reply. He had turned away and was engaged in choosing a cigar from his case.

"By the way," he said slowly, "Mr. Douglass is giving a little dinner to-night after the performance. We ought to go, it will give us a chance to meet several other members of his company."

"Oh, I shall be glad to go," Ruth retorted delightedly.

"Alright, then make yourself look real pretty, dearie. You know how to do that. If I were you I'd wear that pink gown you had on the night we went to the show. It is very becoming."

"Do you think so?" she smiled.

"Indeed, I do," her husband cried. "And don't be quite so demure. Actor folk don't enjoy too much conventionality. They are of the free and easy sort, you know. And when you are in Rome you must do as the Romans do."

"I'll do my best, Guy," she promised.

That night Ruth seemed to be a changed woman Animated by a few glasses of wine, her tongue became loose and her eyes sparkled with gayety.

Douglass would not move from her side.

Ruth, having entered thoroughly into the spirit of the occasion, tolerated him, yes, even encouraged him in spite of the fact that her husband paid close attention to a lovely young ingenue of the company.

And she did not resent it when the actor proposed a toast to her, calling her the most beautiful woman present.

That night before they went home, Fillmore had a few minutes alone with Vernon Douglass.

"I'll be gone for a few weeks," he said to the actor in a confidential whisper. "You might drop around occasionally and cheer up my wife. Will you?"

"Why, of course, old man," the actor answered spontaneously. "Thank you for the invitation."

But it was the invitation which meant Ruth's undoing!

Chapter 113

THE PRISONER.

LIKE THE average American business man burdened with wealth, Philip Gordon never troubled himself about household affairs. He paid the monthly grocery and butcher bills without a murmur of protest when they ran into high figures. At Marshall-Field's, Chicago's premier department store, he had an account so that his wife might make the necessary purchases without troubling him for checks.

Monthly statements rendered by this store seemed to indicate that Alice bought clothing for a dozen women instead of for herself alone.

There had been moments when Gordon deemed it advisable to curb his wife's extravagance. But knowing Alice as he did, he suddenly changed his mind when a propitious moment to speak to her about it, arrived.

In all affairs pertaining to his own business he was strict and exacting. He valued the confidence of his business associates and competitors above everything else.

He was honest and generous in his dealings. It could be said of him that he never took unfair advantage of anyone.

It was regrettable indeed that Phil did not apply some of his business principles in his own home. So long as a good dinner was served at the proper hour he seemed perfectly satisfied.

Continued in next number

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